Warning - May contain Timets

Written by dreamkatcha on behalf of Everything Amiga. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Mr Nutz - Ocean's squirrel-centric RPG-platformer mashup - dangles what you might call a bit of scope for innuendo. If you were reading Viz Online and fall into the sub-thirteen year-old demographic it might have been fun to explore that angle together. However, we at Everything Amiga are above all that puerile nonsense. We're mature, sensible adults... who over-analyse twenty-five-year-old computer games aimed primarily at kids, many of whom now have kids of their own who think their dads seriously need to grow up and get a life.

Far more intriguing than its title is the game's meandering route to market... many *varied* markets spanning a decade. Two and a half decades if you also count the more recent *unofficial* translations to mobile platforms and the CD32.

As the zenith of his eighteen-month incubation drew near, with visions of unveiling the perfect console platformer, former Ocean France colleagues Pierre Adane and Philippe Dessoly first published Mr Nutz for the SNES in November 1993, winning over far more fans than detractors. Accommodating its technologically inferior hardware, it was subsequently ported to the Mega Drive in 1994 following an additional six-month development cycle. Whilst Sonic junkies were less impressed than those reared on a *Mario*-based diet it was still greeted by above-average scores from the press.

Philippe and Pierre were determined they would launch their independent career with a radiantly elegant platform game. What *wasn't* set in stone from the outset was the species of its starring attraction. Chatting to Game Passion in 2015 Philippe revealed that under consideration was a dolphin, turtle, or parrot. Nevertheless, he ultimately plumped for a squirrel, his wife's suggestion.

Muddying the waters somewhat, coder Pierre put a different spin on Mr Nutz' origin story in an interview he gave to Gros Pixels in 2005. You'll have to excuse any strange translation mangleifications. It *mostly* makes sense.

> "Basically, for the character, we thought of a human character. We thought of an adult, then a kid... But in fact, we came to something more cute. We chose the squirrel for that side. The squirrel has the plush side, but at the same time it is smart and lively. In addition, the squirrel has a big tail, which in terms of gameplay could be nice since it could use it. We first worked on the character on paper, then it was quickly transposed on the computer, to see what it gave.
>
> In terms of gameplay, the influences are rather Sonic for the character and Mario for the side 'secret passages' and 'bonus to discover'."

Our humble Amiga 500 designed way back in 1987 was initially to be the lead platform. However, as reported in an Amiga Power article entitled 'Where are they now?' in October 1992, the decision was taken to make Mr Nutz a console-exclusive release. And it *was* where the *French* version is concerned. While never ported to the Amiga in the *true* sense of the word, Mr Nutz *does* exist as an Amiga game. I know it all sounds like pure insan-nutty so I'll break it down to its kernel.

Dished up for a dwindling Amiga community in April 1994 by an entirely different team, our interpretation came bundled with a tacked-on Zelda-style RPG element not present in the original SNES rendition. Mr Nutz was in fact retrofitted into an existing work in progress platformer Ocean acquired the rights to tweak and subsequently publish as an adjunct to the console incarnations. This explains why the blueprint's title was 'Timet: the Flying Squirrel' and not 'Mr Nutz: the half-finished port of that pretty SNES game by those proper talented Ocean France guys who also brought us Toki, Pang and Snow Bros'.

Other than giving the green light to shoehorn their charming protagonist sprite into an independent game, Pierre and Philippe had no involvement in introducing Mr Nutz to the Amiga, previously their system of choice. Where the SNES game was almost entirely a two-man, 18-month labour of love, a whole studio were responsible for bringing the artist formerly known as Timet to life. A task Kaiko (aka Neon) apparently relished with as much delight and passion. In the process, Mr Nutz packed his suitcase, dropped the French accent and bought a German flag at the nearest gift shop.

Coding was taken care of by Jan Jockel, Michael Buttner, and Peter Thierolf. Antony Christoulakis was responsible for the graphics. Music and sound effects were courtesy of Rudolf Stember. Scaling and tunnel effects were the work of Dierk Ohlerich. Klaus Erhardt was the man behind the outro, while level design was a joint effort involving Boris Triebel, Thomas Pottkamper, Sander Karl, Jan Jockel, Antony Christoulakis, and Jens Hansen.

Early in 1993 'Timet: the Flying Squirrel' was showcased in a German Amiga games magazine imaginatively entitled 'Amiga Games' with an ETA of May. In July of the same year they published a brief follow-up reporting that (bear with me, this is translated from German as many of my quotes are)...

"The game will not be released by Kaiko, nor will it bear the name Timet - The Flying Squirrel. Thanks to the energetic help of Amiga Games editor Hans Ippisch, who takes care of the business affairs of the Neon boys, a momentous contact with the English software giant Ocean came about at the fair in London.

These were, as well as Millennium, Virgin and Renegade Timet-enthusiastic, and offered a very lucrative contract. As they happen to be developing a game on the Super NES that also features a flying squirrel as a hero, they came up with the terrific idea of simply declaring Timet as an Amiga version of the Super NES game.

So Timet will appear in October as Mr Nuts, of course for the A500. However, it was not just this one contract. In addition, there was an agreement on a Mega Drive version of Mr Nuts, which will be nothing more than the implementation of the Amiga version. After Factor 5, finally, another programming team from Germany has managed to join the illustrious circle of console developers."

In issue 30 of Edge magazine dated March 1996 there's a brief run-down of Neon's company history. Speaking of their affiliation

with Ocean it states that...

> "Their first project together was Mr Nutz, a cutesy Amiga platformer very much in the Sonic mould. A video of the game was pitched to several companies at the Spring '94 ECTS and out of all the offers they received, Ocean's was the most attractive. As Peter Thierolf explains, 'Ocean were the only company that offered to produce the game on a console, which we were very interested in.'
>
> At the same show Neon also pitched a few game ideas to Ocean's then development director, Gary Bracey. He was unimpressed so Neon went back to their hotel room, phoned the rest of the company in Germany and came up with some brand new ideas. When they returned to the show they had the blueprints for what would become Vanished Powers, Tunnel and Viper.
>
> The original six members of Neon now employ another dozen coders and artists and the company is planning to convert Viper and Tunnel to Saturn, as well as Vanished Powers to PlayStation. Expect more details soon."

It's not clear how the two stories mesh together, if they refer to the same conventions, or if the dates even compute, but the upshot remains the same; at some point, Ocean made Kaiko/Neon an offer they couldn't refuse. One they gladly accepted because that's the way unrefuseable offers generally work.

Shortly before, amidst a debilitating wave of financial difficulties, Antony, Boris, Jan, Michael, and Peter spun-off their operations to co-found Neon Software, while Kaiko limped on until ultimately folding in 1995. Today they are most fondly remembered for gifting us with Apidya II (but not the first one), as well as The Adventures of Quik and Silva released via their New Bits on the RAM label.

Complicating matters further, Neon was entwined with the German games developer, Factor 5, which explains why graphics routines implemented in Neon's Nutz ended up being recycled for inclusion in the Amiga port of Mega Turrican aka Turrican 3, released in 1993. It's a messy story so we'll say the two versions were co-developed by Factor 5 and Neon and leave it at that.

Here's an abrupt yet still vaguely relevant tangent. Had Timet remained a fixture he was to be animated by a chap called T.R. Schmidt. Schmidt went on to design three levels for the freeware Turrican clone, Hurrican, released for Windows and the Amiga in 2007. Additional level design was contributed by Gerhard Weihrauch aka ScHlAuChi who recorded the longplay of Mr Nutz you are watching right now. Interesting coincidence, don't you think?

Now sporting a Neon Software badge, Timet was retooled under the auspices of Ocean's production team. Grudgingly he conceded his premature redundancy and hasn't been heard from since.

To distinguish Neon's squirrel from the SNES rodent, he was re-branded with the subtitle 'Hoppin' Mad'. It's often considered to be a sequel, despite the games bearing little relation to one another aside from the starring attraction. Do squirrels *really* hop? Isn't that more of a *rabbity* thing? I've always pegged squirrels as erratic little *scurriers* myself. Nevermind, I'll check with David Attenborough later. *He'll* know.

Neon's sequel of sorts was to be ported to the Mega Drive where it would also be known as Hoppin' Mad, though due to the diminishing returns generated by SEGA's ageing platform, the finished project was shelved indefinitely following its review in Mega Fun magazine in June 1995. Despite the fruitless work invested, Peter Thierolf appears to have lost little sleep over its absence. Speaking to Playstation Plus magazine he disclosed that "In the end, Mr Nutz on the Mega Drive never came out. There were lots of bugs in it, and we'd already moved onto better projects".

It's also Neon's best work in Peter's opinion. Asked to pick his favourite by segacollection.com he decided "The one I probably like most is Mr Nutz for SEGA Genesis, or the Amiga version as the Genesis one was never released."

Now I'm really confused. Is anyone else getting mixed messages here? Also, it can't be *finished* as well as *knowingly* full of bugs, can it? Peter has confirmed *both* on separate occasions. Probably just one of those lost in translation things. Ignore me.

Jan Jockel, discussing the highs and lows of his career with Euro Gamer in July 2009, corroborated Peter's preference, reaffirming Neon's reasons for partnering with Ocean. Again, this is translated from German so consider it paraphrasing.

> "We are console players. We always preferred to play at the console rather than on the PC. Our goal with Mr Nutz, who was first developed on Amiga, was to come to the console. We had a pretty good Amiga demo at that time and then we were able to sell the game to Ocean, which allowed us to develop the game on SEGA Mega Drive. And indeed, the console conversion was done cleanly and on time, but was never marketed by Ocean. PSone and Saturn had already

As the source code was made available online in 2009 it's now possible to play a beta revision of the SEGA Mega Drive ROM of Mr Nutz via emulation. Obviously you will encounter some strange glitches. That said, the same is true of the finished Amiga game. It's not uncommon to become stuck in the scenery, or for collectables to be lost in walls.

Mega Drive Nutz is largely equivalent to Amiga Nutz, minus the 3D stages. Some were replaced with 2D side-scrolling shoot 'em up jaunts, while others were simply snipped without fanfare. Certain bosses are smaller, and other minor tweaks were made to compensate for the system's hardware restrictions. In both cases, there's a distinct lack of nuts (with an 's').

On the contrary, a monochrome Game Boy adaptation of Mr Nutz created by the original double act with support from a number of other Ocean staff *did* make it to market in 1994. As did a revamp

for the Game Boy Colour in 1999 courtesy of Planet Interactive Development.

A further update for the Game Boy Advance developed by DreamOn Studio emerged in 2002, demonstrating that the public's appetite for anthropomorphic cutesy squirrels was no mere flash in the pan. If Scrat of Ice Age fame alone isn't testament to this, Conker the Squirrel's perennial popularity leads one to the same conclusion. Incidentally, fans of both Conker and Mr Nutz have gone to great lengths to draw parallels between the two franchises, alluding to the older IP, Mr Nutz, as a potential source of inspiration for Rare who first unleashed their deviation in 1997.

Considering the range of platforms on which he appeared, it's amazing our nutty chum isn't more widely known, and that further spin-offs failed to materialise, notwithstanding his progenitor's ongoing affection for the character. We'll get to that later.

UK-based Amiga gamer's first brush with the red rodent occurred via a cover disk demo accompanying the May 1994 issue of The One magazine. At this stage Mr Nutz was marketed as a traditional platformer, giving the impression it would be similar to its Nintendo big brother. It wasn't until the final release that the overhead map exploration element was appended, transforming the offering into an altogether different proposition. In fact, as late as January 1994 journalists working for The One magazine were still under the illusion that we were to receive a port of the SNES game as featured on Big Breakfast hosted by Gabby Roslin. Footage of this appears to have been lost to the mists of time, though the French TV adverts which include a fusion of cartoon animation and in-game footage *can* still be found on YouTube.

Spanning just three disks (*four* if you had the cracked version, not that we'd condone that) it's a gargantuan accomplishment featuring multiple layers of eight-way parallax scrolling, VBL sync, SNES-inspired scaling and Mode 7 techniques, and humongous end of level bosses. As opposed to the console renditions the emphasis is on non-linear, Sonic-esque speed freakery rather than judicious, leisurely exploration in the Mickey's Magical Quest mould. Our startled hero seemingly breaking the fourth wall to evacuate beyond the screen in the event of his death appears to corroborate this.

Amy - the name I'll be abbreviating 'our Amiga squirrel' to despite the confusing trans-gender issue - is instilled with more attitude and an edgier appearance, enhancing his street cred to hook the older kids. With the noble freedom fighter already a proven hit thanks to his starring role in a Sky One touch-tone phone-in challenge, his transition to a fully controllable home computer game was a done deal.

Summing up the already wafer-thin storyline on the back of the SNES version's sleeve it states...

"Mr Nutz only he can prevent a new and permanent ice age. To help him on his way he's got a lotta Nutz, a lotta gutz and one enormous tail."

It's not a political campaign against creeping environmental catastrophe incited by modern living that Mr Nutz faces, but a crusade to thwart 'Mr Blizzard', a despotic yeti hell-bent on world domination.

Deploying his mystical powers he intends to encase every living, breathing creature in an ice cube... and then, and then... oh, I don't know. Surely he'd get pretty bored all on his lonesome in a frozen wasteland, wouldn't he? Plus there would be no-one left with a functioning, non-cryogenically hibernating brain to do his bidding, so he'd end up having to get his *own* hands dirty and frostbitten. That's hardly befitting of an evil overlord, is it?

It's not that the Amiga version's plot was rehashed, just *retained* from the earlier Timet builds. Glancing at the preview pictures you'll notice that certain sprites critical to the story arc were present all along. Switching them at such a late stage

would have necessitated extensive changes that likely wouldn't have warranted the time and money invested, so we wound up with a more intricate plot to compliment our multifaceted iteration. No bad thing as it turns out.

The 'Day After Tomorrow' style deep freeze aspect is kind of still present except the looming yeti dictator has been usurped with ultra-intelligent chickens from outer space. In the manual, the bizarre tale is comprehensively regaled by a seagull. Of course, it is, who else? Let's hear it from the... erm, horse's (?) mouth.

Congratulations you have bought a great game. Mr Nutz is not just a squirrel, he's one of the fastest squirrels ever! But time's getting short. Strange things are going on and it may already be too late...

What has happened?

Once upon a time there was a planet with nothing on it but chickens. The chickens were clever animals, inventing many gadgets, racing cars, video games, space ships and every house had a coffee machine - easy life!

The chickens continuously clucked a contented cluck. But then a severe winter set in and all the coffee plants were destroyed. Of course, it was impossible to program any video games without coffee. The chickens clucked a quarrelsome cluck. Without their video games, they didn't want to work, no-one wanted to harvest the grain and soon the storerooms were bare.

Restless, frustrated and driven by hunger, the chickens set out to terrorise space. They moved from planet to planet

collecting all the animal and vegetable life they could find to replenish their stores back home. They harvested the planets using huge machines that sucked up the atmosphere. Without air, the planet's surface grew very hot and the inhabitants were grilled. The chickens then flew over the planet and bombarded their harvest with various spices. They then quick froze their harvest on the cold, dark side of the planet, loaded up and shipped it out back to home base.

Whenever the chickens came across lifeless planets, they released animals and planted crops and then, after letting life develop, they returned for the grill, spice, freeze process. The chickens travelled through space turning peaceful animals into TV dinners.

One fine day the chickens reached Peanut Planet, a small planet in the sign of Neon. There was no sign of life there and so they sowed plants and released many species of animals and left, planning to one day return and reap the harvest. Foolishly they left two members of their own race on the planet...

Several million years later...

Life had developed marvellously on Peanut Planet. The planet had become a famous holiday resort and animals from all over the universe came to visit its beautiful shores. Even the famous squirrel Mr Nutz had chosen it as his favourite spot to spend leisure time between adventures.

The chickens had also been very active, you could now find them behind every tree, although their stupidity was a well-known fact throughout the galaxy. Some languages had even developed the expression, 'as stupid as a chicken from Peanut Planet'.

Finally, the chickens from outer space came back to harvest the planet. At that time, the local chickens started to behave strangely, telling everyone that they were the emperors of Peanut and warning the rest of the inhabitants to watch out.

That's the history lesson out of the way, now it's time for action. I'm just a seagull and there isn't much I can do. Maybe Mr Nutz can help us. Right now he's here on vacation, eating curd cheese turnovers and generally taking it easy, after all he's saved the world twice during the last 18 months and he deserves a break. But now he has to do something about those chickens! They are starting to get annoying. Who do they think they are? They come from who knows where in the deepest reaches of space and start thinking they're in charge. Would *you* want to be governed by some decadent poultry? Of course, you wouldn't. That's why I'm flying to Mr Nutz now before he becomes so fat from all those curd cheese turnovers that he can't fight the chickens. See you later."

"Fight chickens? How ridiculous! A squirrel can't fly. Only we, the chickens can fly. We are born to fly and to govern the universe. I'm not afraid of that squirrel. No-one will be able to defeat us or our allies, the mighty chickens from space. See you later..."

So to save the dumbo chicken descendants of the clever evil world-conquering chickens we must traipse around seagull's eye view map screens, chin-wagging with the local inhabitants, hoarding objects, and solving puzzles. This being an amuse-bouche kind of prelude to the main platforming course, we must plough through a number of 'getting to know the neighbours' sequences, answering multiple-choice questions and deciding which paths to take in order to get at the steak, delineated by flag markers. That is the segments that comprise the entire game for console owners. You know, the platformy bits in case all this pretentious waffle is obfuscating what is actually a very simple concept to grasp.

Four themed worlds comprise the Peanut Planet holiday resort archipelago we were rudely conscripted to save - nature, underground, water, and Inca. Each are accessed via rafts or transporters; technically *tele*porters if you want to be pedantic. Transporters are used to swiftly navigate between continents, however, only once they have been reactivated by liberating all the bases found within the current area. Hitching a ride on rafts achieves the same end, except they travel back and forth across the sea between islands automatically and are boarded/disembarked using diving boards.

Our goal on each continent is to shoo the chickens away from the 'important' bases marked with red pennants, while ignoring the blue ones. Each continent harbours a sprawling 'Techno City', access to which is only granted upon capture of the final base. Once breached we have free reign to race through the open tunnel (constructed using scanline raster effects in case you were wondering) culminating in an end of level guardian skirmish.
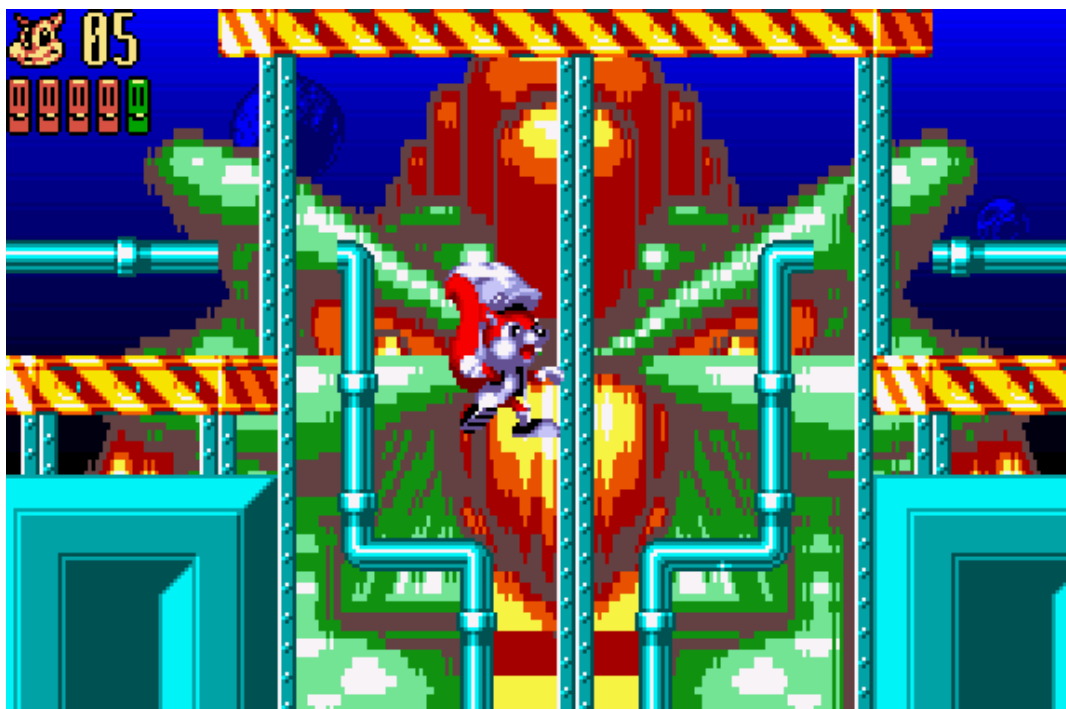
Defeat the record-breaking sized sprites, foiling their odious scheme to distract you with voguish SNES-style, Mode 7 scaling sorcery and it's onto the next continent. Emancipating a continent turns its flag from red to green on the world map to remind us how far we've come, and what still lies ahead.
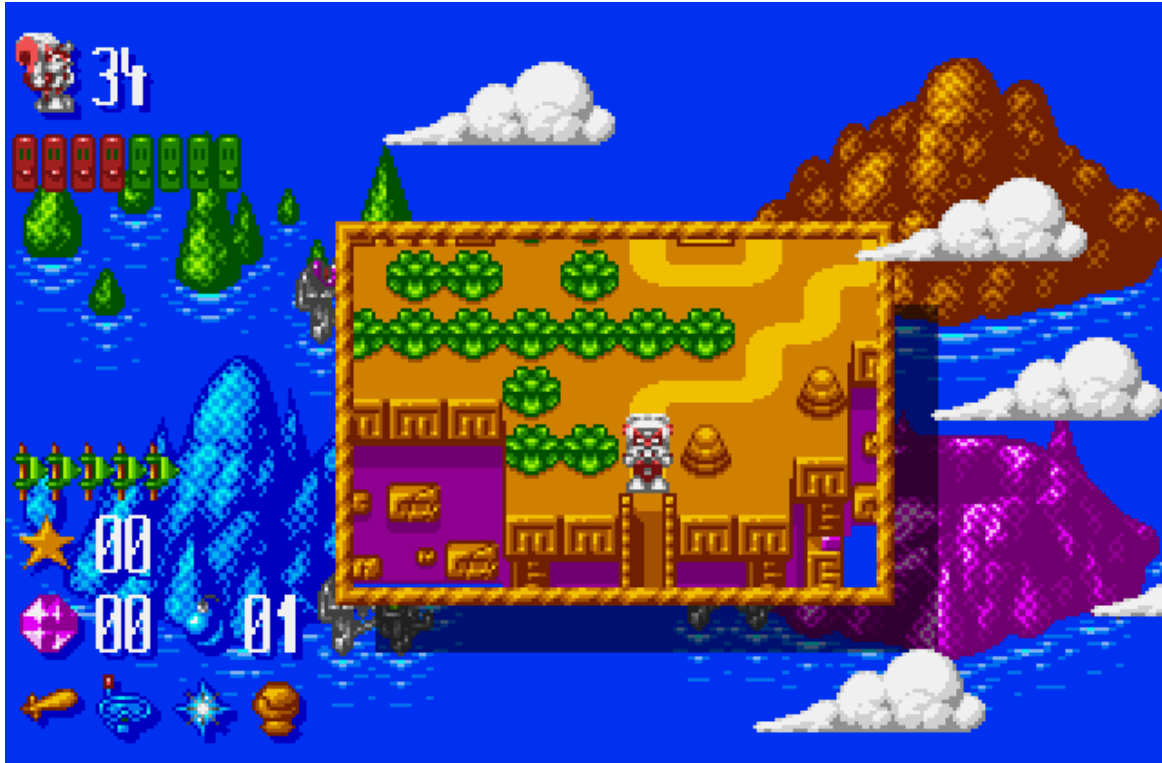
Between bouts we must investigate every chest stumbled across, traversing the map screens to reveal useful bounty, or helpful hints presented by our seagull chaperone. Oppressed Easter bunnies too are on hand to assist should we require advice on… erm, reproduction, battery capacities, or whatever.
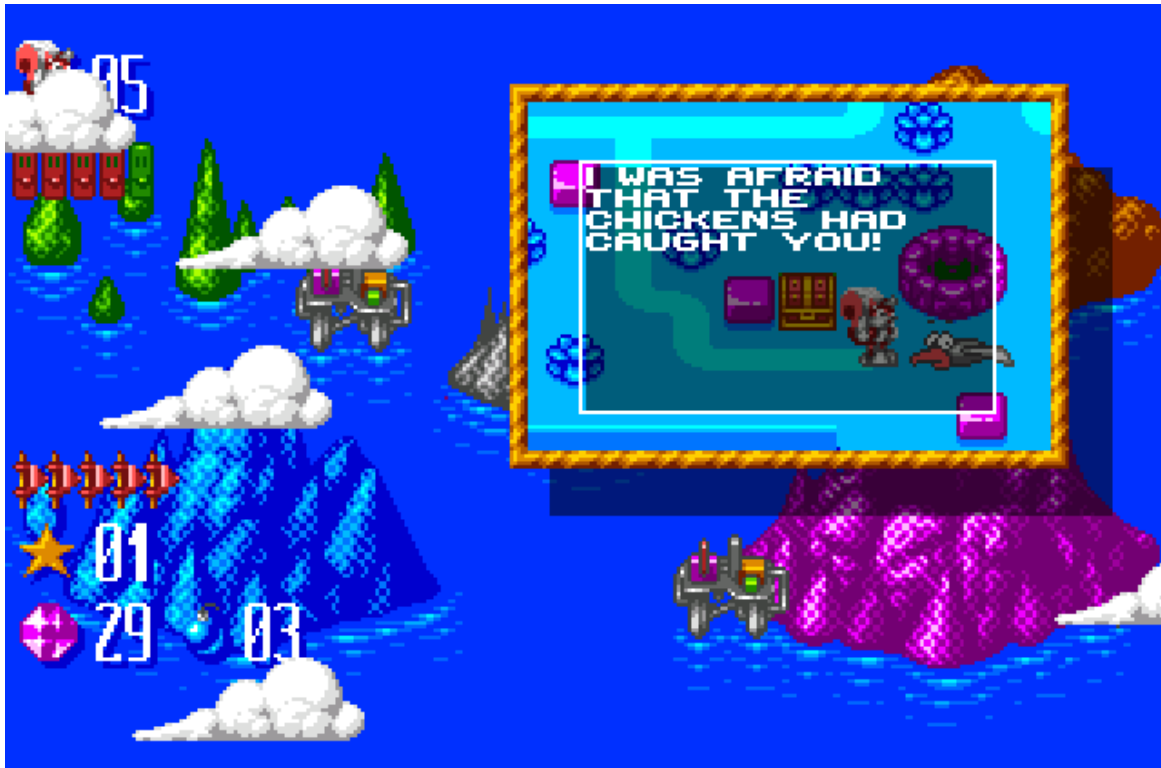
Be sure to ignore the talking bushes though; they're just chickens in disguise who'll try every trick in the book to throw you off the scent. About as senseless as a lump of rock you could say. These only exist to block our path, and so must be cleared with a limited arsenal of bombs.

Additional supplies can be scavenged from chests - the chicken's not so hidden hideaways - along with feathers conferring the ability to fly, assuming you have first accrued five hit points. Snagging one feather merely allows us to glide like Bubsy, though feather your metaphorical cap with a second and third and you instantly become far more agile and capable a la the caped crusader, Super Mario. If you can wrangle your head around the tricky control system it's possible to soar into the sky, swoop back down at breakneck pace, change direction at will and even perform loops. This is no bog-standard platformer. It has a learning curve and rewards your perseverance.

Until you remove the 'L' plates, you may find you take a few knocks too many. Hitpoints serve as your energy metre and strangely enough are actually talking, sentient creatures that can

be shaken loose from your torso whenever you make contact with an enemy, yet also re-collected to restore it. Unless you happen to be squaring up to a boss at the time, then all bets are off. This aspect seems to have been modelled on Sonic's ring-gathering mechanic, only its affect on your well-being is less subtle. As such, control over the player's survival is placed firmly in their hands rather than leaving them to the mercy of arbitrary, unpredictable threats as so many earlier games were liable to do.


Sonic's weighty momentum should be familiar territory too. Mr Nutz is initially slow to gather pace, although once in full swing races around his playpen like a banshee with a critical schedule to keep. Curling into a fetal ball he'll accelerate down hills like a mound of Edam at a cheese rolling festival. Much like the blue spiky one then, as long as you keep in mind that this *doesn't* provide any protection whatsoever against enemies. Pffft.

Unfortunately, Mr Nutz also contains plenty of underwater swimming sections featuring a limited oxygen mechanic. In fact, at least a quarter of the game is dedicated to this mode of play. Without the diving goggles in place you soon turn blue and begin to lose hit points, forcing you to desperately scrabble to the surface to draw breath. Often you'll need to go deep-sea diving - even *outside* of the designated water level - to activate switches, allowing you to advance to otherwise inaccessible areas, so there's really no avoiding them.

As frustrating as they are, they *do* give the coders chance to implement some impressive modulated sound techniques. Submerged, the audio becomes muffled as you'd expect in the real world, restoring to full clarity as Mr Nutz surfaces. The same routine is implemented especially effectively in Kid Chaos, also released in 1994.
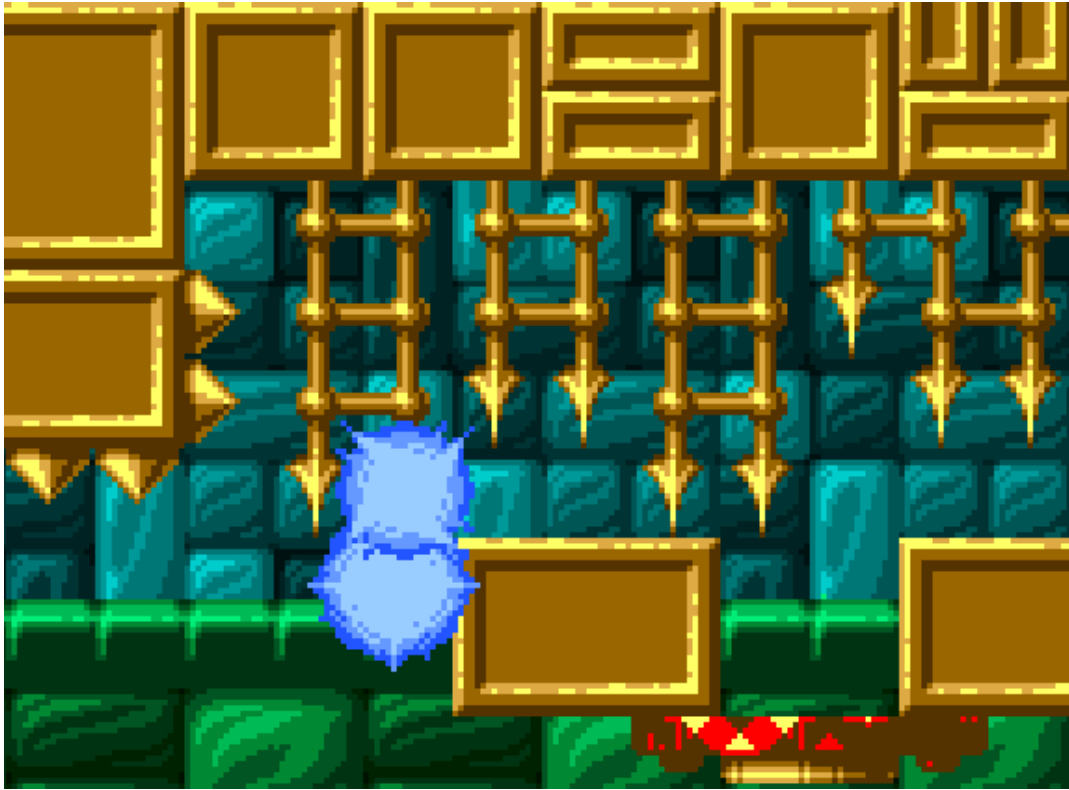
Flash spells triggered with the space bar transform Mr Nutz into a lethal chicken-slaying bolt of lightning. While the fist power-up won't make us invulnerable, it's another useful string to our bow, and in the absence of the endless supply of nut projectiles our protagonist possesses in the console versions we'll need all the help we can get. Mind you, as punches are only effective against small to medium meanies, and must be employed whilst jumping (by holding fire and pulling down), they fall short of being the platforming equivalent of a Swiss Army knife.

More versatile are the walking mushrooms that can be exploited as trampolines to reach higher ground; wait long enough for them to align with a target platform and a whole new world opens up to you. Must resist the urge to break into song. No Mario-inspired game can be considered complete without a bit of edible fungus! Wildlife, in general, come to think of it.

Stalking the console versions are a plethora of foes with which to contend, including ambling apples that alternately appear as Ribena berries, determined by the system on which you're playing.

Then there are the moles, hammering tree hands, spiders, owls, ladybirds, beetles, Venus flytraps also on loan from Mario, and hedgehogs (or are they porcupines?) that lose their protective spikey overcoat if you chuck a nut at them, revealing a nappy-wearing two-legged baby beneath, who can then be bounced on without any reprisals. And that's just the *forest* level. Apparently Mr Nutz is perfectly built to tackle them all without breaking into a sweat because eating curd cheese turnovers has made him grow up to be big and strong. Don't ask me, I just read it in the manual.

By contrast, Mr Nutz on the Amiga is confronted by a far more limited range of opponents. Aside from the wasps, the vast majority are simply the same chickens disguised in a variety of different outfits. Even the bushes turn out to be covert chickens. Mummy-chickens and robo-chickens *do* at least adapt their behaviour accordingly, it must be said.
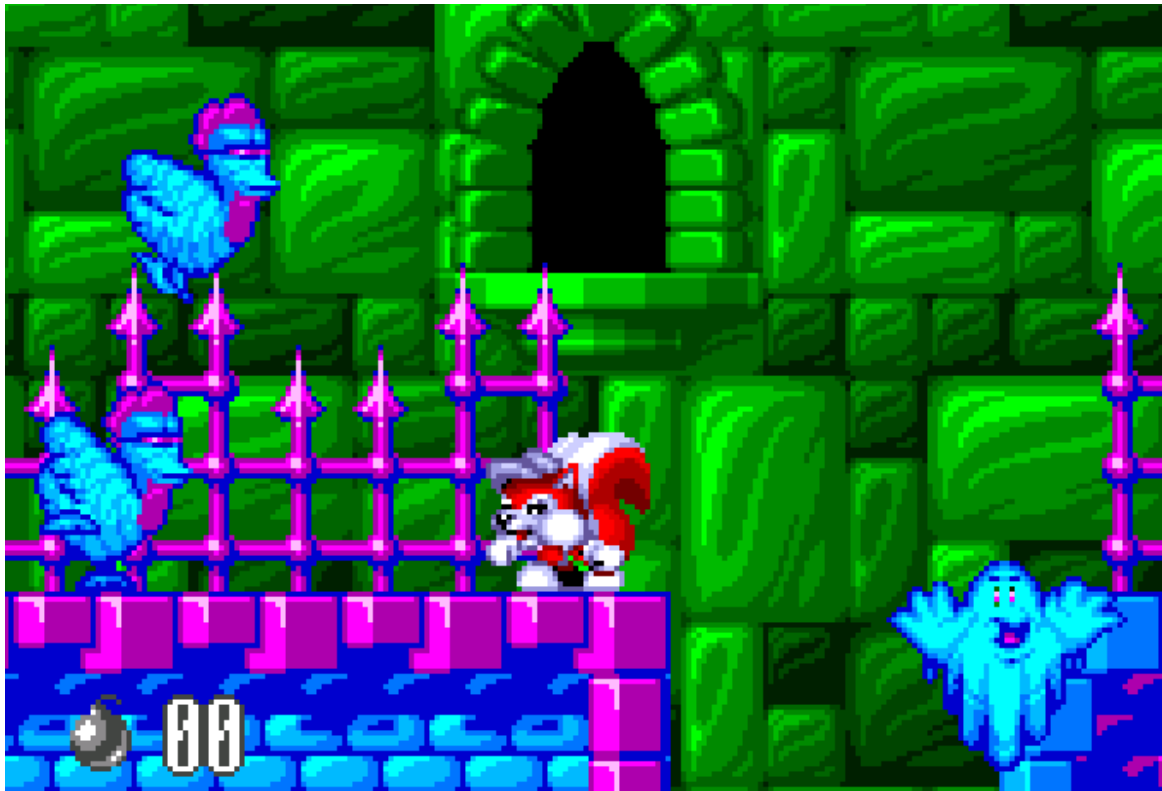
Somehow I sense that Neon were fans of absurd humour and watched a lot of Monty Python sketches while designing this. It would certainly explain what that levitating, talking fish is doing skulking about on terra firma throughout the map areas. I mean apart from playing hide and seek with his or her son.

Currency takes the form of collectable gems that are automatically exchanged for hit points, bombs and stars during the 'reckoning' screen at the end of each level.

A hit point will cost you 25 gems, a bomb - also found in hidden bonus chambers - 50 gems, and a star 99 gems. The latter are used during the RPG stages to barter with certain Peanut residents, pay ghosts for warp zone travel, or trips into the clouds, or to save your game.

Other items are instead foraged from the environment. Hitpoint-restoring hearts, 1ups (acknowledged via a cute speech sample) and two varieties of shield for example. Green shields provide cover against a single collision before wearing off, whilst the red ones - clearly Boing balls - confer invulnerability for a limited period. They'll flash before wearing off to indicate when they're about to expire so as not to give you any nasty surprises.

Some of these are only found within the conspicuously Sonic-y 3D warp zone bonus rounds, the egg timers for instance. These either reward you with an extra 10 seconds, or reduce your remaining time by the same period. Similarly, wings and *anti*-wings confer a speed boost or reduction for 15 seconds. Power-ups aside, the warp zones are a gem looter's dream! If they remind you of the 'World of Commodore' sequence from 1992 that's because they were coded by the same demo scene maestro, Chaos/Sanity.

Implausibly stunning as Hoppin' Mad is visually, considering it's not an AGA title, it falls short of the SNES incarnation, in particular, thanks to its extremely vibrant, well-chosen colour palette and the artistic flair of Philippe Dessoly. He would have slotted in perfectly at any of the golden era Disney animation studios given that recreating the evocative, wistful aesthetic that defines Fantasia or Castle of Illusion, for instance, seems to come so naturally.
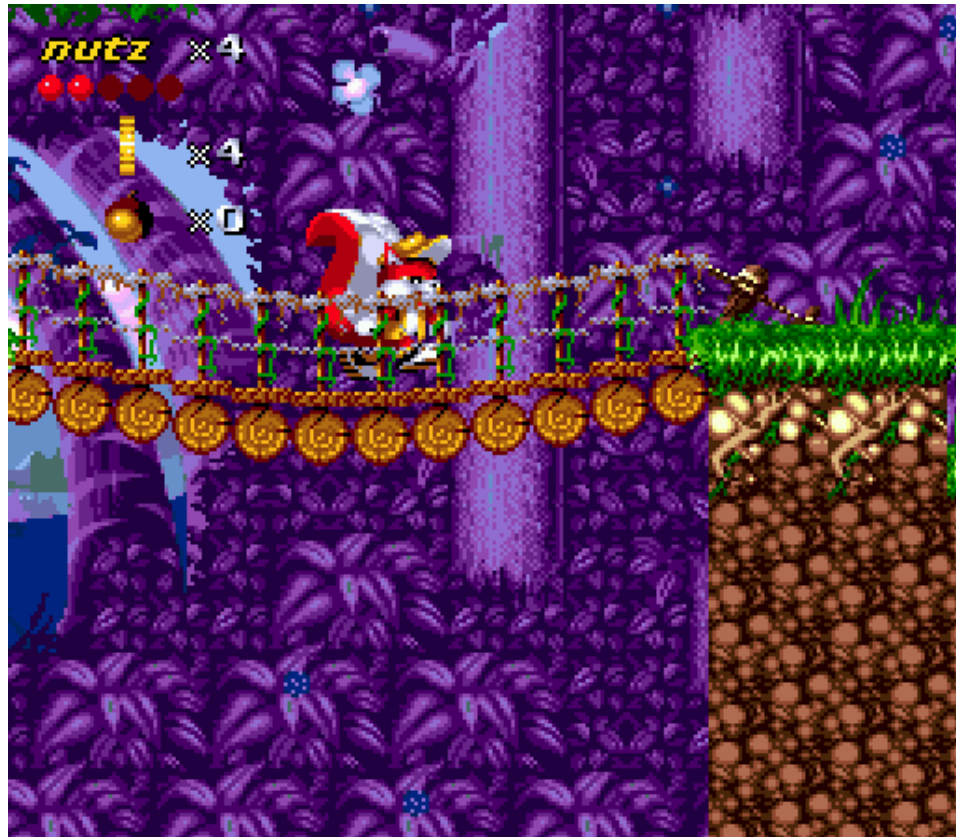
Attention to detail is meticulous, second to none. For some excellent examples we can look towards the deforming bridges made popular by the Sonic series (and duplicated beautifully in Kid Chaos). Those, and the tremendous array of animation frames that ensure Mr Nutz manifests as an enchanting lead worthy of Ocean France's reputation for premium quality. His knees bend to gently break his fall, and extra care was lavished on bestowing him with a push animation, engaged whenever he butts up against stationary objects, even if it achieves nothing. Then there are the pixelating and circle in and out scene transitions that transport the player between levels as smoothly as any Warner Bros cartoon.

Sadly these nuances were lost in the transition to the Amiga, no doubt a trade-off for the switch to hyper-speed. Even so, had we never seen the SNES original we'd be none the wiser, and have no cause for complaint. With each world significantly different to the last, Mr Nutz is an aesthetic delight to behold whichever prism you happen to be looking through. That said, it's not without its caveats.

Hoppin' Mad engages the Amiga's dual-playfield mode and is therefore hamstrung by a dearth of colours. Statistically speaking at least. In real terms, the drawback is that it can often be difficult to discern foreground objects from those in the background because they share the same limited palette

selection. This ensures you often unexpectedly collide with camouflaged enemy sprites, and miss key platforms. It doesn't help knowing that what can and can't be treated as a platform isn't always consistent, even within the same world.

Elsewhere this is compensated for by sublime transparency effects as seen in the title screen menus and lapping water, and the pixelation grid textures applied to the landscapes. You'd think this might make them look more primitive, except the subtle refinement has the *opposite* effect.

The illusion of ambient weather too is candy for the eye. With no prior warning, clear skies become overcast and swell with precipitation (the Meteorological Office's word for good old fashioned rain) intimating the passage of time in a genuine environment. On that note, in terms of technical wizardry, the Amiga game wins hands down. It's infinitely faster, incorporates multiple layers of parallax backdrops and many simultaneously on-screen sprites, yet its silky smooth scrolling never falters.

It's also the deeper, more elaborate game by far. In terms of length alone, Hoppin' Mad takes four or fives times as long to complete as the original; over six hours even for an expert judging by the longplay footage available on YouTube! Footage that forms the basis of this video it should be noted. Cheers Recorded Amiga Games!

Lengthy *and* tough, this is not a game for the faint of heart to put it mildly. Whether or not this should be an entry in the pro or con side of the equation will fluctuate widely amongst players depending on their level of competency and patience. Whilst the levels are immense in terms of sheer area covered, the elements employed in their construction are very repetitive, making it all too easy to become lost or even bored.

Lucky then that 'save slots' are an option. Yes, that's the terminology used. No doubt Neon were attempting to clone the console feel they felt we craved, and they themselves preferred, right down to semantics and the Americanism 'mom'. Not that the Mega Drive or SNES were homegrown US products, merely the principle gaming platform that side of the pond.

For such a significant, presumably satisfying aspect of the game, flying should really have been easier to get to grips with. In reality, many people swerve it all together; a shame since certain hidden bonus areas are accessible only through feather-assisted flight.

Music throughout is very tame, tantamount to a never-ending lullaby, sending you drifting off into a glazed stupor at times. Jaunty and upbeat, it's excellent in small doses. Perfect under the

appropriate circumstances, it's just that something a bit more rousing and memorable wouldn't have gone amiss.

While it's Rudolf Stember who is credited for providing the music in the finished product, Amiga Games magazine reported in an article entitled 'Kaiko's Breakthrough' that Chris Huelsbeck was initially to be involved. It's not clear why he dropped out of the running. Incidentally Chris and Rudi were the musicians who composed the score for the Amiga version of Monkey Island, proving that Rudi was capable of so much more than Mr Nutz would suggest. Not that it doesn't have its highlights. A tune that seems to have been influenced by the Monkey Island soundtrack can be heard playing in Mr Nutz' Inca world. Once you know the connection it's unmistakable.

Sound effects too were the remit of Rudolf Stember. They're appropriately cartoony and compelling, even stretching to quirky fragments of speech samples. Hurray! Personally, the only one I would have left on the cutting room floor is the springing noise our hero emits each and every single time he leaps into the air. That can get irritating extremely quickly unsurprisingly.

Running the game via floppy disks back in 1994 would have been a real chore given the long load times and excessive swapping demanded. 1mb of memory was suggested to minimise this, and running it on an A1200 would have reduced disk accessing times further. As Mr Nutz was only ever intended to be released as an OCS/ECS title, this would have yielded no additional benefit. In accord with Kid Chaos it's hard to imagine how the introduction of the AGA chipset would have improved the game had an advanced special edition version been developed. 8 out of 10 kittens thought they *were* playing the AGA release.

If you're a fan of aerial view map exploration as found in Super Mario World you'll no doubt consider Hoppin' Mad the superior brand of Nutz. Conversely, this is the aspect of the game with which most critics took umbrage upon its release. On the whole it

was a turn-off that prevented them from delving further to discover what else the title had to offer.

Even if RPGs happen to be your predilection, aficionados too tell us it's not a particularly good representative of the genre. You play in a tiny window for no apparent reason and the dialogue branches are extremely linear, often leading you down the same path regardless of the choices you make.

Ultimately this component is more of a gimmicky series of segueways wedged between the real action to add a shake of spice to the mix. Perhaps if they'd taken a backseat to the platforming sections, remaining a minor diversion rather than being elevated to an even footing, the game would have felt more balanced and enjoyable.

SNES gamers were largely a separate breed to us Amiga folk; what would appeal to one group wouldn't necessarily appeal to the other. That's why some genres are almost entirely absent from the SNES, and vice versa.

This appears to have been reflected in the sales figures. According to Pierre, the SNES version sold out within a week and could easily have shifted many more copies had it not been for the modest production run. Hoppin' Mad, on the contrary, didn't make a dent in the sales charts. Its greatest accolade appears to have been receiving an award from Amiga Joker magazine. In their February 1995 issue readers voted it the 'Best Dexterity Game' of 1994.

Having saved Peanut Planet from impending doom Mr Nutz faded away into obscurity. These days I'd imagine he selects his holiday destinations more prudently to avoid any repeat incidents involving demented chickens nurturing totalitarian ideologies.

To this day Philippe still sketches Mr Nutz in various guises with all the affection of a doting parent, embracing him as the basis for his animation classes.

He even attempted to revive his furry child as the star of a sequel in 2015. Discussing the potential Kickstarter with ZE Player in June of the same year Philippe described it as "a brand new game! It will have nothing to do with the first one, it will be neither a conversion nor a remake, but a good old game of families as we like to do, an old-fashioned platform game."

Surprisingly it wasn't to be an HD remake destined for modern platforms. SNES, Mega Drive and Dreamcast were all name-dropped into the conversation.

In spite of the public's positive response to the proposal - a "tidal wave" as Philippe puts it - and an ETA of late 2016, the project has yet to come to fruition. For all intents and purposes it can be considered 'on ice', appropriately.